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Thursday, August 9, 2018**

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Sano ties it in 9th, but Tribe walks off over Twins

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | August 8, 2018

CLEVELAND -- It ended with yet another walk-off loss, but it was another positive night for third baseman Miguel Sano, who went 2-for-4 with a double and a game-tying solo homer in the ninth.

It wasn't enough, however, as reliever Trevor Hildenberger served up a game-winning three-run homer to Francisco Lindor in a 5-2 loss to the Indians on Wednesday night at Progressive Field. It was Minnesota's 11th walk-off loss of the year, which leads the Majors.

"It was a big moment down there to take a nice at-bat," Sano said. "Like [assistant hitting coach] Rudy [Hernandez] told me: 'Stay positive. Try to drive the ball to the middle. Find a good pitch to hit.' That's what I did."

Sano tied the game with a leadoff homer in the ninth off closer Cody Allen, smacking a 2-1 curveball to right-center field for his first homer since returning from a six-week stint in the Minors. Sano is hitting .278/.381/.472 with a homer, four doubles and four RBIs in 11 games since his return.

"I just think it was a matter of time the way his at-bats have been going, the swings he has been taking," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "To stay on that breaking ball, especially after the one up and in, was a nice response. It was probably the biggest one he's had for us since he's been back."

The homer helped right-hander Jake Odorizzi avoid the loss after allowing two runs (one earned) over 4 2/3 innings with no strikeouts. In 150 career starts, Odorizzi had only failed to strike out a hitter once: an injury-shortened outing in which he went one inning against the Red Sox on April 15, 2017.

"I never looked at myself as a strikeout guy -- I'm not upset about it in the least bit," Odorizzi said. "I induced a lot of weak contact. I thought, compared to the first couple of times I faced them, this was the best I've been against them. That's all I can really be happy about."

Odorizzi registered five swings and misses -- all on fastballs -- but was hurt by 26 foul balls, as he needed 101 pitches to record 14 outs. The Indians jumped out to an early lead, but it was keyed by a leadoff double from Lindor that was misplayed by center fielder Jake Cave. Cave initially broke in on the line drive to center, but it ended up going over his head for a double despite it having a 99-percent catch probability, per

Statcast™.

Michael Brantley followed with a sinking liner that Cave nearly snared in center, only for it to fall out of his glove for an error to allow Lindor to reach third. Edwin Encarnacion brought home the game's first run on a sacrifice fly to center, as Cave couldn't throw out the speedy Lindor as he tagged up from third.

"I had to pitch around it and just tried to do my best to pick up Jake," Odorizzi said. "I know he feels horrible for everything. He's going to learn from it. He's going to do better from it. But I was trying to do my best to limit the damage, get him off the hook."

Odorizzi ran into trouble again in the fifth, when Yan Gomes opened with a single and Brandon Guyer bunted down the third-base line and Sano couldn't handle it. Odorizzi induced a hard-hit grounder from Lindor to second base, but Logan Forsythe booted the potential double-play ball, only getting the out at first. It set the stage for Brantley's go-ahead RBI groundout to shortstop.

"They got one of their runs on a play that was an in-between hop and we couldn't field it cleanly and only got one out," Molitor said. "Brantley hits one off the end of the bat and we couldn't get a double play there, either."

Offensively, right-hander Mike Clevinger held Minnesota in check, allowing one run over seven strong innings. The Twins, though, committed another costly mistake in the third, when they had two runners on with one out, only to see Mitch Garver picked off second base by catcher Gomes. Garver was initially ruled safe, but it was overturned after replay. It helped Clevinger escape the jam, after he got Jorge Polanco to pop out to end the inning.

The Twins scored their lone run against Clevinger in the fourth to tie the game, as Sano led off with a double and scored on a one-out double off the wall from Forsythe. Forsythe, though, was stranded there after Logan Morrison grounded out and Garver flied out to right.

After Odorizzi departed, relievers Trevor May, Matt Magill and Taylor Rogers combined to throw 3 1/3 scoreless innings to keep the Twins in the game. But Hildenberger struggled for a second straight night, and saw his ERA rise to 9.90 in 11 appearances since the All-Star break after giving up the two-out homer to Lindor.

"We've been using him a lot," Molitor said. "I've got to say, for the most part he's done a good job stepping up. Lindor's just a really good hitter. He got him last night, and tonight it looked like he was looking for that changeup and he was able to keep it fair."

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

With Forsythe at second with one out in the ninth, the Twins let Morrison swing away on a 3-0 count and he hit a comebacker to Allen, who was able to start a relay to throw out Forsythe between second and third. Morrison advanced to second on the play, but the Indians challenged the call on the field. After a review, Morrison remained safe, but after a walk from Garver, pinch-hitter Ehire Adrianza struck out to end the inning.

SOUND SMART

The 11 walk-off losses ranks are tied for the fourth-most in a season in Twins franchise history. The club record is 15 walk-off losses in 1964. The MLB record is 16, shared by the 1969 Giants, the 1975 Astros and the 1966 Red Sox.

"Is it a record? It's tough," Molitor said. "They've come in a lot of different fashions. Probably at least half have been home runs. But there's been other things that have caused us to walk off with a loss. It's just kind of the nature of the game when you're on the road playing close games, as we seem to. There just hasn't been a lot of separation in a lot of these games and it just comes down to the last couple of innings and you find yourself in that predicament. It has been a part of the storyline of the season."

YOU GOTTA SEE THIS

Right fielder Max Kepler helped keep the Twins alive with an impressive leaping catch up against the wall in right-center to rob Gomes of extra bases with one out in the ninth and Jason Kipnis at first. After the grab, Kepler flipped the ball to Eddie Rosario to throw in so that Kipnis couldn't tag up.

HE SAID IT

"I'm feeling good. A lot of work. I've got my mind positive and I'm ready to do my stuff every day and come work. Every day, it's the same thing and I'm going to try to stay positive all the time." -- Sano, who is feeling better after improving his conditioning during his time in the Minors after undergoing offseason surgery on his left shin

UP NEXT

Right-hander Jose Berrios (11-8, 3.51 ERA) will start for the Twins in the series finale on Thursday at 12:10 p.m. CT in what should be a pitchers' duel with Indians ace and fellow All-Star Corey Kluber (14-6, 2.63 ERA). Berrios is coming off a strong start against the Royals, allowing two runs over seven innings with six strikeouts. Kluber threw a three-hit shutout against the Angels in his last start.

Mejia (wrist strain) could make next start
Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | August 8, 2018

CLEVELAND -- After further examination on Wednesday, left-hander Adalberto Mejia's strained left wrist suffered in Tuesday's 3-2 win over the Indians wasn't deemed serious, and there's a chance he could make his next scheduled start on Sunday against the Tigers.

Mejia allowed one hit over five scoreless innings on Tuesday, but came out of the game after feeling pain in his left wrist that radiated up the outside of his arm on his last pitch. But he felt better after the game and it continued to improve on Wednesday. The Twins were hoping for more clarity Wednesday, but Mejia will throw long toss on Thursday and a bullpen session on Friday before Minnesota determines whether he's healthy enough to start Sunday.

"He's doing better today," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "[Head trainer] Tony Leo has asked to buy a little more time. He's really encouraged about the opportunity for him to go ahead and throw on Sunday. But the day after, you are not going to do much. We are going to buy a little bit more time than the original 24 hours that we talked about."

Mejia has pitched well this season, posting a 2.01 ERA with 13 strikeouts, nine walks and one homer allowed in 22 1/3 innings. But if he can't go, right-hander Fernando Romero is scheduled to start for Triple-A Rochester on Sunday and could be recalled. Lefty Stephen Gonsalves, Minnesota's No. 5 prospect per MLB Pipeline, is lined up to start Thursday for Rochester.

Romero threw eight scoreless innings for Rochester, striking out eight and scattering four hits on Sunday, but it technically came in relief after reliever Alan Busenitz started the game but allowed three runs in the first.

"They used the 'opener' in that game, so you look at the numbers and read the report," Molitor said. "The attacking, the command of all his pitches. He's always on your radar as a guy you can dip down and get if you need someone."

Twins experimenting with 'opener' strategy in Minors

As Molitor noted, the Twins have been trying out the "opener" strategy at both Double-A and Triple-A, with relievers starting games based on matchups and getting followed by a traditional starter, who usually bridges the gap to more relievers -- or, in Romero's case, finishes the game. At Double-A, the Twins have even implemented batters-faced limits, with the "long reliever" slated to pitch to exactly 18 batters, or two times through the order to avoid the penalty that statistics have shown comes with facing a lineup for a third time.

Using an "opener" is a strategy the Rays have utilized in the Majors this season since May 19, and they have the fourth-best ERA in baseball over that stretch, although they don't use it every game.

"I think there's enough curiosity for us to see how it plays," Molitor said. "There are lot of factors on who you are going to open and it depends on who you're going to follow. What constitutes the other team's lineup as far as if it's left/right, all those types of things. This thing has a chance to pick up legs across the game, but you know, as we get more data in return, you can't argue with Tampa's success. That's for sure."

Molitor credited farm director Jeremy Zoll for implementing the idea, but senior analyst Josh Kalk certainly had a role, as he came over from the Rays' organization this offseason and is considered a pioneer and an expert in pitching analytics.

Molitor said he hasn't been pressured to utilize it in the Majors, but did say it's been discussed and wouldn't rule it out this season. Reliever Trevor May has experience starting, as does lefty Taylor Rogers and righty Matt Magill. Right-hander Michael Pineda is also expected to return from Tommy John surgery and could be an option, as well.

"I don't know that I'd put a number on it, but it wouldn't surprise me if we did it," Molitor said. "We've had discussions about up here. We're seeing how it's playing down there. I don't know if we'll get to that situation and do it by the end of the year or not. So yeah, like everything that involves change in this game, we're more than willing to look at and see if it's something for us to do."

Buxton hits in the cages

Center fielder Byron Buxton, on the Minor League disabled list with a left wrist sprain, progressed to hitting indoors on Tuesday and Wednesday, which is slightly ahead of schedule. He's not expected to return to Triple-A Rochester until next week, as Buxton needs to continue to test the wrist, which has bothered him since mid-July and has seen him placed on the DL twice.

"I think the hard part with this injury, from what I can understand and from some personal history, is that you take your normal swing during BP or off the tee or flips, you're not getting fooled," Molitor said. "It's not having to start and stop and check swings. I think that's when these things get aggravated. Those are tough to simulate in a practice environment."

Miguel Sano homers but Twins lose in a walk-off to Francisco Lindor, Indians
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | August 9, 2018

CLEVELAND – Errors. Bad routes on fly balls. Bungled baserunning. The Twins did it all — badly — on Wednesday.

That they were one swing away from tying the score in the ninth inning was remarkable — and then they got that swing.

Miguel Sano’s first homer since May 31 knotted the score at 2-2. But the Cleveland Indians retaliated in the bottom of the ninth when Francisco Lindor lined Trevor Hildenberger’s hanging changeup into the seats in right for a three-run homer to walkoff the Twins 5-2 at Progressive Field.

Walkoff loss No. 11 of the season was one of the more painful ones because Sano tried to bail out his team with his mighty swing off Indians closer Cody Allen. Then Cleveland, 0-for-9 with runners in scoring position until the ninth, responded.

“It was a big moment for him, hitting a walkoff, which was bad for us,” said Sano, who went 82 plate appearances between home runs. “It’s just part of the game. We need keep working and come back tomorrow and do our job and win the game.”

Hildenberger took over in the ninth and sandwiched two outs around a Jason Kipnis single. One out away from extra innings, Brandon Guyer singled to left. Hildenberger then elevated a changeup, and Lindor extended his arms and lined it into the stands.

“Kipnis goes the other way, and he got behind Guyer and had to come in 3-1, and Lindor’s just a really good hitter,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said. “He got him [Tuesday] and tonight it looked like he was looking for that changeup and he was able to keep it fair.”

From the outset, Twins righthander Jake Odorizzi pitched under duress created by one of the sloppier performances by the Twins defense this season.

To start the first inning, Jake Cave broke the wrong way on Lindor’s liner to center that sailed over him for a double. He had a chance to atone for his mistake on the next play, but he dropped Michael Brantley’s liner for an error. Lindor advanced to third, then scored on a sacrifice fly. It was Cleveland 84th first-inning run this season, the second most in baseball.

Logan Forsythe’s RBI double in the fourth tied the score at 1-1. But the Twins were back at it in the fifth.

With Yan Gomes on first, Guyer bunted down the third base line. Sano rushed in but failed to handle the ball with his bare hand. Lindor hit a bouncing ball that the Twins might have been able to turn into a double play. But the ball spun out of Forsythe’s glove. Forsythe was able to snatch the ball with his right hand and get a force play at second. On cue, Brantley followed with a ground ball to short that allowed the run to score.

There was more.

Mitch Garver was picked off second base in the third when Gomes threw behind him. Garver then threw wildly to second on Jose Ramirez’s stolen base in the bottom of the inning, allowing him to advance to third. Reliever Trevor May threw wildly to first during a pickoff attempt in the sixth, enabling Melky Cabrera to move to second.

The game looked more lopsided than it was — but it was about to get even worse with the latest walkoff disaster.

“It’s not something you want to be a part of,” Odorizzi said. “It shows we’re in a lot of games. I think that’s the brightest spot to take out of it. That’s 11 games we’re in to the very end.”

Rosario is the Twins' new Everyday Eddie

La Velle E. Neal III | La Velle E. Neal III | August 9, 2018

CLEVELAND – Eddie Rosario went 4-for-4 on Tuesday and entered Wednesday tied for the American League lead in hits as he continues his fine season at the plate.

But Rosario’s production is just part of the story. He’s also been durable.

Rosario made his 75th consecutive start of the season Wednesday, batting second and playing left field.

Out of the 113 games the Twins have played, Rosario has played in 112 and started 108.

“It’s good,” Rosario said, predictably. “I don’t like staying in the dugout. Sometimes I’ll feel tired from the [time zone change] or the night games to day games. It’s tough but this is the major leagues.

“I want to play major league games. All the legends in the past did it, and nobody had an excuse.”

Meet the new Everyday Eddie, whose bat (.299, 20 home runs, 66 RBI) is needed in the lineup more than ever after July’s deadline deals. His glove is needed, too; his eight outfield assists are tied for the third most in the American League.

Rosario is just needed.

“Define ‘horse,’” manager Paul Molitor said. “[Is it] 155 games or what?”

If Rosario plays in every remaining game, he’ll be the first Twin to play more than 160 since Justin Morneau played all 163 in 2008. Morneau started every game that season.

Three players — the Padres’ Freddy Galvis and the Braves’ Freddie Freeman and Nick Markakis — have appeared in every game this season for their clubs.

Rosario’s willingness to handle the workload is one less thing Molitor has had to worry about.

“I’m kind of leaving it open to him unless I really feel strongly about a given day,” Molitor said. “If he wants to play, I’m going to give him every chance, at least for the most part.”

Bullpen test on hold

Adalberto Mejia spent Wednesday undergoing treatment on his left wrist after suffering a strain Tuesday on the final pitch he threw to the Indians.

“He’s doing better today,” Molitor said. “I was hoping we would have a little better indication of what Sunday might bring. But [head trainer] Tony Leo has asked to buy a little more time. He’s really encouraged about the opportunity for him to go ahead and throw on Sunday.”

Mejia, 2-0 with a 2.01 ERA in five appearances for the Twins, is expected to play some catch Thursday, then attempt to throw in the bullpen Friday. For now, the Twins haven’t named a Sunday starter.

Buxton swings

Byron Buxton, who is on the disabled list at Class AAA Rochester, is testing his sore left wrist.

“He hit in the cage yesterday, and I guess with the weather [Wednesday] it is going to be in the cage down there again,” Molitor said. “I think that we’re probably not looking at a game until sometime next week if the next three, four, five days go well as progressing with his swing.”

Proving his health, however, can be tricky. Because batting practice is different than actual games.

“They immobilized it for four days just to make sure he didn’t irritate it,” Molitor said. “There was a collaboration that said that this was something we can find out sooner rather than later without much risk.

“I think the hard part with this injury, from what I can understand and from some personal history, is that you take your normal swing during BP or off the tee or flips, you’re not getting fooled. It’s not having to start and stop and check swings.

“I think that’s when these things get aggravated. Those are tough to simulate in a practice environment.”

After their latest clunker, the Twins can still split series with Indians
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | August 8, 2018

Ugh, that wasn't pretty to watch.

The mistake-prone Twins were walked off 5-2 on Wednesday by Cleveland and need to win Thursday's afternoon game to earn a split of the four-game series.

That was walkoff loss No. 11.

"They've come in a lot of different fashions," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "Probably at least half have been home runs. But there's been other things that have caused us to walk off with a loss. It's just kind of the nature of the game when you're on the road playing close games as we seem to. There just hasn't been a lot of separations in a lot of these games and it just comes down to the last couple of innings and you find

yourself in that predicament. It has been a part of the storyline of the season."

As ugly as Wednesday's game was, Thursday's potentially could be quite entertaining.

The Twins will send Jose Berrios to the mound opposite of former Cy Young winner Corey Kluber - who's coming off his seventh complete game shutout on Saturday. He's had some hiccups this season but he's still 14-6 with a 2.63 ERA. Judging by his last outing, the Klubot is back.

Berrios will be making his first start of the season at Progressive Field. He's 2-0 with a 2.63 ERA in two career starts at Progressive Field. He's also 7-0 against AL Central opponents this season.

So this series, in which the Twins have looked awful in two games, can still be tied after tomorrow. Provided that Berrios is up for the challenge.

And the Twins can score more than two runs.

And the Twins can make fewer than 19 mistakes.

Twins' walkoff woes

Staff Report | Star Tribune | August 9, 2018

On Wednesday, the Twins suffered a team-record eighth walkoff homer loss this season.

Date	Winning homer	Twins pitcher	Score
3-29	Adam Jones, Balt.	Fernando Rodney	3-2 (11)
4-22	Carlos Gomez, T.B.	Addison Reed	8-6
4-26	Gary Sanchez, N.Y.Y.	Fernando Rodney	4-3
5-3	Trayce Thompson, ChW	Addison Reed	6-5
5-26	Mike Zunino, Sea.	Matt Magill	4-3 (12)
5-29	Alcides Escobar, K.C.	Taylor Rogers	2-1 (14)
7-27	Mookie Betts, Bos.	Matt Belisle	4-3 (10)
8-8	Francisco Lindor, Clev.	Trevor Hildenberger	5-2

Wednesday's Twins-Cleveland game recap

Staff Report | Star Tribune | August 8, 2018

GAME RECAP

IMPACT PLAYER

Francisco Lindor, Cleveland

The Indians shortstop hit a three-run, walkoff homer off Trevor Hildenberger.

BY THE NUMBERS

5-31 The last time Miguel Sano homered before his ninth-inning, game-tying homer Wednesday night.

4 Hits allowed by Twins starter Jake Odorizzi in 4²/₃ innings.

ON DECK

There is a quick turnaround for the series finale, with aces Jose Berrios and Corey Kluber facing off at 12:10 p.m.

Mejia making progress but not yet named starter for Sunday
La Velle E. Neal III | Star Tribune | August 8, 2018

Adalberto Mejia was hooked up to a machine before Wednesday's game to help with his recovery after suffering a strained wrist on Tuesday on the final pitch he threw to the Indians.

The discomfort he felt was not elbow related, and there is optimism that he will make his next scheduled start on Sunday against the Tigers, but they won't be sure until he throws in the bullpen. Head trainer Tony Leo told Molitor to wait one more day before having him start to ramp up for that start.

"He's doing better today," Molitor said. "I was hoping we would have a little better indication of what Sunday might bring. But Tony Leo has asked to buy a little more time. He's really encouraged about the opportunity for him to go ahead and throw on Sunday."

"But the day after you are not going to do much. Provably long toss tomorrow and bullpen on Friday. So we are going to buy a little bit more time than the original 24 hours that we talked about."

Mejia, 2-0 with a 2.01 ERA, is expected to play some catch on Thursday then attempt to throw in the bullpen on Friday. For now, the Twins have TBA listed as the start on Sunday.

Here are the other pitching matchups for the Detroit series:

Friday: Ervin Santana vs Jordan Zimmerman

Saturday: Kyle Gibson vs Francisco Liriano

Sunday: TBA vs Matthew Boyd.

Buxton swings

Byron Buxton, who was shut down with a strained left wrist, took swings in the batting cage on Tuesday and was scheduled to hit indoors on Wednesday.

"He hit in the cage yesterday and I guess with the weather today it is going to be in the cage down there again," Molitor said. "I think that we're probably not looking at a game until sometime next week if the next three, four, five days go well as progressing with his swing."

That suggests that Buxton, trying to salvage a season derailed by injuries and lack of solid contact, has come around faster than they thought. But that thinking could be dangerous when dealing with a hand-wrist injury.

"They immobilized it for four days just to make sure he didn't irritate it," Molitor said. "There was a collaboration that said that this was something we can find out sooner rather than later without much risk."

"I think the hard part with this injury, from what I can understand and from some personal history, is that you take your normal swing during BP or off the tee or flips, you're not getting fooled. It's not having to start and stop and check swings. I think that's when these things get aggravated. Those are tough to simulate in a practice environment."

Buxton is in a race against the calendar to get back on the field at Class AAA Rochester and impress enough to merit joining the Twins for the final month of the season. Remember, the minor league season ends in late August, so Buxton needs a stretch of games there to try to find his offense. The Twins might shut Buxton down if he can't sharpen his bat.

Francisco Lindor hands Twins 11th walk-off loss, their most since 1987
Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | August 8, 2018

CLEVELAND — Miguel Sano finally ended his home run drought with a game-tying shot off Cody Allen in the ninth, but it still wasn't enough for the hard-luck Twins.

Francisco Lindor topped Sano with a three-run walk-off homer off Trevor Hildenberger in the bottom of the ninth as the Cleveland Indians took a 5-2 win at Progressive Field on Wednesday night. Lindor danced his way around the bases after jumping on the first pitch to hand the Twins their 11th walk-off loss, most in club history since the 1987 edition suffered 12 of them en route to the World Series title.

The franchise record is 15 walk-off losses in 1964. Of course, the Twins reached their first World Series the following season.

Eight of this year's walk-offs have come by homer, two more than the previous franchise record from 1985. That's the most for any team since the 2010 St. Louis Cardinals, who won the World Series the following season.

"It's tough," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "They've come in a lot of different fashions, but there have been other things that have caused us to walk off with a loss. It has been a part of the storyline of the season."

Starting with Adam Jones on Opening Day and continuing though Lindor's 29th homer, the Twins have also been sent to the showers on homers by Carlos Gomez, Trayce Thompson, Gary Sanchez, Mike Zunino, Alcides Escobar and Mookie Betts.

Hildenberger became the sixth different Twins pitcher to surrender a walk-off homer this year, joining closer Fernando Rodney (twice), Addison Reed (twice), Matt Magill, Taylor Rogers and Matt Belisle.

For Sano, who spent six weeks in the minors rebooting his career, it was his first homer since May 31 at Target Field, also a game-tying shot off an Indians reliever (Zach McAllister). The Twins lost that one 9-8 after wiping out an eight-run deficit.

The Twins fell 10 games behind the first-place Indians but still lead 8-7 in the season series.

"It shows we're in a lot of games; I think that's the brightest spot to take out of it," Twins starting pitcher Jake Odorizzi said. "That's 11 games we're in to the very end. I'm sure there are a lot of points in the game, looking back on those 11 games, that if we had done something a little bit better we could have won the game."

Odorizzi's defense certainly didn't do him any favors, but the Twins right-hander still made the wrong sort of personal history.

For the first time in a big-league career that now spans 153 outings and 150 starts, Odorizzi failed to strike out a single batter while throwing more than one inning. His only other K-free appearance came April 15 of last season at Boston's Fenway Park.

Working into the fifth on 101 pitches, Odorizzi gave up just two runs (one earned) on four hits and two walks (one intentional), but he couldn't put the Indians away. A dozen times he worked the count to two strikes, but three of those confrontations resulted in hits.

Lindor's first-inning double sailed over the head of center fielder Jake Cave, who took a false step upon contact and couldn't quite recover. Michael Brantley followed with a first-pitch liner right at Cave, who dropped it for an error.

Edwin Encarnacion's sacrifice fly punctuated a 23-pitch first for Odorizzi, who failed to complete five innings for the seventh time in 24 starts with the Twins.

"I know he feels horrible for everything," Odorizzi said of Cave. "He's going to learn from it. He's going to do better from it. But I was trying to do my best to limit the damage, get him off the hook and just kind of give him a little pat on the butt like, 'I got you like you got me.'"

The Twins made two more errors but neither proved costly. Catcher Mitch Garver's throw trickled into center field on Jose Ramirez's third-inning stolen base, and reliever Trevor May made an errant pickoff throw in the sixth.

Speaking of pickoffs, Garver was nabbed at second by catching counterpart Yan Gomes in the third. That pushed the Twins' league-leading pickoff total to 15, six clear of the rest of the American League.

Doubles by Sano and Logan Forsythe tied the game in the fourth off Indians right-hander Mike Clevinger, but Sano couldn't handle Brandon Guyer's popped-up sacrifice bunt attempt an inning later. Sano wasn't charged with an error, but his barehand flub opened the door for Brantley's go-ahead roller to shortstop.

Twins take note of Bartolo Colon's record-setting 246th win
Mike Berardino | Pioneer Press | August 8, 2018

CLEVELAND — Bartolo Colon's record-setting 246th victory on Tuesday night for the Texas Rangers resonated in the visiting clubhouse at Progressive Field.

After breaking Dennis Martinez's 20-year-old mark for most wins by a pitcher born in Latin America, the 45-year-old Colon soon heard from two of his closest friends in the game: Twins pitchers Ervin Santana and Fernando Rodney.

"I'm very proud of him," Rodney said Wednesday. "I think it's a great career. Now I hope Ervin breaks the record."

Santana, wearing earbuds as he watched something on his iPad at the next locker, looked up and smiled when Rodney repeated his challenge.

“I said, ‘Ervin now is going to try to break the record,’ ” Rodney said, raising his voice for effect. “Right, Ervin?”

Santana, who ranks fourth among Dominican-born pitchers with 149 wins, just smiled and nodded.

“I talked to Bartolo last night,” he said of his former Los Angeles Angels teammate (2005-07). “He’s very happy with it, and I’m happy for him. He’s going to continue pitching.”

Wait, past this year? Hadn’t Colon, who rediscovered his mojo while going 5-6 in a 15-start cameo with the Twins late last season, said he was hanging them up after his 21st season in the majors?

“I don’t know,” Santana said. “If he’s healthy, why not? He’s proving to everybody he can still get wins, he can still pitch and can still get people out. Even though he doesn’t have the velocity, he knows how to pitch. That’s what teams are looking for: that veteran guy who knows how to pitch.”

Nothing had been decided yet on what sort of gift the Twins would send to commemorate the achievement.

“We’ll have to talk, me and Rodney,” Santana said. “We’ll have to come up with something for him.”

MEJIA OK

Left-hander Adalberto Mejia continued to show improvement Wednesday after leaving his start the night before with a strained left wrist.

The Twins plan to push Mejia’s side session back a day to Friday after he plays long toss Thursday morning. A decision on whether Mejia, who has thrown 10 straight scoreless innings (all against the Cleveland Indians) will be able to take his scheduled turn Sunday at Detroit will be made after Friday’s bullpen.

Head athletic trainer Tony Leo was “really encouraged,” Twins manager Paul Molitor said, about Mejia’s recovery. Late Tuesday Molitor said Mejia described “a stinging effect in the lower left forearm — closer to the wrist — that radiated up through the elbow.”

Mejia noted the sensation was on his outer arm, which should alleviate concerns about a possible elbow ligament problem. No MRI was planned.

BUXTON PLAN

Triple-A Rochester center fielder Byron Buxton, back on the disabled list with a sore left wrist, was scheduled to take indoor swings for a second straight day.

His wrist had been immobilized for four days “to make sure he didn’t irritate it,” Molitor said.

The hope is for Buxton to return to game action sometime next week, but first he must show his wrist can handle awkward swings.

“The hard part with this injury is you take your normal swing during (batting practice) or off the tee or flips, you’re not getting fooled,” Molitor said. “It’s the start and stop and check swings where these things get aggravated. Those are tough to simulate in a practice environment.”

RESPECT FOR RODNEY

When Rodney notched his 25th save Tuesday night, it marked the seventh time in his career (all since the start of 2009) that he had produced a 25-save season.

Just two other pitchers in the past decade can make that claim: current Boston Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel (eight times) and the Los Angeles Dodgers’ Kenley Jansen (seven). Aroldis Chapman (Yankees) notched his sixth 25-save season recently, and the retired Jonathan Papelbon also had a half-dozen such seasons since the start of 2009.

Current Twins setup man Addison Reed did it three times, while former Twins closers Glen Perkins (three) and Joe Nathan (four) had their runs as well.

“I’m very proud of the job I’ve been doing in my career,” Rodney said. “Every number I’ve been putting up, every number I keep putting in the books, they make me feel happy and proud of the job I’ve been doing. I’ve been working hard in my career.”

BRIEFLY

Baseball America rated the Twins seventh in its updated organizational talent rankings, up from 12th at the start of the season. Heading into 2017

the Twins ranked 22nd in the same survey, which now places only the Chicago White Sox (fourth) ahead of them among AL Central competitors. The Detroit Tigers were 14th, followed by the Cleveland Indians (25th) and Kansas City Royals (26th).

3 Twins players land in Top 20 August trade candidates from MLB Trade Rumors

Derek Wetmore | ESPN 1500 | August 8, 2018

Don't turn your attention from the 2018 Minnesota Twins just yet. The Twins still have things to learn, and they may still have some trades left to make.

The July non-waiver trade deadline gets most of the hype, but as we saw last season, August trades can happen and sometimes they can even impact a World Series.

MLB Trade Rumors published a list of 20 August trade candidates, and 3 current Twins players made the list. Fernando Rodney, Ervin Santana and Logan Morrison all are candidates to be traded, says MLBTR. They also added Addison Reed as an "honorable mention."

Fernando Rodney

MLBTR called it a "mild surprise" that Rodney wasn't dealt, even though he has a \$4.25 club option for next season. The list speculated that it's "all but certain" Rodney would be claimed if he's put on waivers.

Here's what we wrote about Rodney last week in our own August Trade Candidates post:

The Fernando Rodney Experience has been mostly good for the Twins but it's had its frustrating moments. The first month in particular was lousy, which probably sticks around in the minds of followers longer because it takes a while for even a good reliever's numbers to recover.

Since May 1, Rodney has pitched 32 innings with a 37:13 strikeout-to-walk ratio (27.8% strikeout rate) and a 2.81 ERA. At just \$1.4 million the rest of the way — plus a \$4.25 million option next year or a quarter-million-dollar buyout — the ageless closer is also relatively affordable. The trouble with trying to trade Rodney, I guess, is that every contender already appears to have a stacked bullpen. Rodney could slide into the 7th or 8th inning if a contender was looking to lengthen its list of relief options this August. Maybe in the event of an injury. Short of that, would the Twins be better off just keeping Rodney, making the call on the option this November, and if they bring him back, assigning him to the 7th or 8th inning next year? The prospect return in a trade likely would be minimal.

Ervin Santana

MLBTR says that because of Santana's salary, it's "quite likely" he would clear waivers if the Twins put him through that process. His buyout would be for \$1 million next year, if the Twins decide they've got enough starting pitching to pass on paying \$14 million to a 36-year-old starter coming off an injury wrecked year.

Here's what we wrote about Erv last week:

Santana's odyssey back to the big leagues is well-documented. He's back now, and appears to be pitching with a diminished fastball from what we saw out of Erv last year. He's got a couple of starts under his belt, and that would have to be enough for a team to want to take a risk on him, since the post-surgery body of work isn't extensive.

He's owed about \$4.6 million the rest of this year and has a team option for \$14 million next year. I'd probably turn down that 2019 option if I was the Twins, so let's assume he's in a free-agent walk year for any club interested in the services of the veteran former rotation rock. If he makes 10 starts the rest of the way, is that worth the money to some team out there? Or, would that contract allow Santana to slip through waivers and become a tradeable commodity again?

Logan Morrison

Trade Rumors called the rest of Morrison's contract "steep" given his production this season, but said that he could make an "intriguing bench/platoon bat for the right contender."

The 30-year-old lefty slugger is hitting just .190/.282/.377 with 15 home runs this year in 351 plate appearances. He gets shifted routinely because of his pull-heavy approach at the plate. And MLBTR points out that Statcast data suggests that Morrison is hitting the ball better than his surface-level stats give him credit for. (They point to a big disparity between his Expected Weighted On-Base Average and his actual wOBA.)

Here's what we said about Morrison last week:

Morrison has not been what Twins fans were hoping for when their favorite team landed a 38-homer breakout slugger during spring training. He was expected to get a bulk of the plate appearances at DH and spell Joe Mauer from time to time at first base, all while delivering on the improved power he showcased in Tampa Bay last season.

Instead, he's hitting .193/.290/.383 with 14 home runs as a DH and part-time first baseman. Even if his batted-ball profile and expected Weighted On-Base Average would suggest there's some bad luck working against him, those are not the offensive numbers he would hope to see roughly two-thirds of the way through the season. He's owed roughly \$1.8 million the rest of the year with an \$8 million option for next year, or a \$1 million buyout. There are also some plate-appearance-based incentives that he could reach. So the August question becomes: Would a team claim him at about \$2.8 million for two months of a lefty power threat? And what would the Twins do with the roster spot if he was no longer on the team?

Powder power: Francisco Lindor's walk-off homer lifts Indians to 5-2 win over Twins
Associated Press | Fox Sports North | August 9, 2018

CLEVELAND (AP) — Francisco Lindor skipped down the third-base line, crossed home plate and suddenly couldn't breathe.

He wasn't alone.

Lindor connected for a three-run homer with two outs in the ninth inning as the Cleveland Indians again moved 10 games ahead of Minnesota in the AL Central with a 5-2 win over the Twins on Wednesday night.

Lindor, who struck out with the winning run at second base in the ninth to end a 3-2 loss on Tuesday, drove the first pitch from Trevor Hildenberger (2-3) over the wall in right to trigger a wild celebration.

As the Progressive Field crowd roared as if it was October, the All-Star shortstop pointed and waved to the fans before being swarmed by his teammates, including pitcher Carlos Carrasco who emptied most of a bottle of white baby powder on him.

"I didn't see it otherwise I would have touched the plate and ran," Lindor said of Carrasco's powder-packed ambush. "I felt powder and then all of a sudden I ran out of breath. I just tried to get out of there."

Down 2-1, Minnesota tied it in the ninth on Miguel Sano's leadoff homer against Cody Allen (4-4), who cost Mike Clevinger a victory and wound up with a blown save and win.

Lindor saved him.

Jason Kipnis singled with one out in the ninth before Twins right fielder Max Kepler raced back and robbed Yan Gomes of extra bases with a leaping catch before crashing into the padded wall.

Brandon Guyer followed with a single to bring up the electrifying Lindor, who has a knack for coming up big in clutch moments.

"It's like every time it's a spot like this he's always hitting when it's a chance like this, and it's like a sixth sense," Clevinger said.

"You know it's gonna happen. Like you look over on deck and you're like 'Does he bat every time it's a tie game?' And then every time it seems like he's coming through too, so it's huge."

Lindor's homer was his 29th and gave him an MLB-leading 67 extra-base hits and 99 runs.

Allen, the Indians' dependable closer — and career saves leader — not only let the lead go, he cost Clevinger his first win since July 1. The right-hander limited the Twins to one run and five hits over seven strong innings, retiring the final 11 batters he faced before turning things over to Cleveland's bullpen, which has been much better after some earlier struggles.

However, Allen's 2-1 knuckle curve didn't fool Sano, as Minnesota's cleanup hitter pounded his eighth homer over the wall. It was the ninth homer allowed by Allen in 47 1-3 innings — a concerning statistic for the Indians as the push toward the playoffs.

Minnesota committed three errors in the first six innings.

"We didn't do a lot with the bats, Clevinger was good," Twins manager Paul Molitor said. "It just came down to trying to find a way to get back to even, which we did with Miggy with one swing, and then they put together the rally there in the bottom of the ninth."

There's one thing about walk-off wins that Terry Francona doesn't care for.

RBI CLUB

Cleveland has five players with at least 60 RBIs. No other team has more than three.

TOUGH LOSSES

The Twins aren't strangers to late-inning pain, having lost 11 times on walk-offs.

"It comes down to the last couple innings, and you find yourself in that predicament," Molitor said. "It's been a part of the story line of the season."

PITCHING PLAN

Minnesota may follow Tampa's lead and use relief pitchers to open games before bringing in the scheduled starter. The Twins are intrigued by the method and have researched the experiment in the minor leagues. Molitor suggested the club could begin implementing it soon.

"I don't know if we'll get into that situation by the time we get to the end of the year or not," he said. "Like everything that involves change in this game, we're more than willing to look at it and see if it's something that might be something for us to pursue."

LONG RUN

The Indians officially released reliever Zach McAllister, who had been with the club since 2010. The 30-year-old was designated for assignment last week.

McAllister struggled this season, going 1-2 with a 4.97 ERA in 41 appearances.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Twins: Molitor still doesn't know if LHP Adalberto Mejia will make his next start. Mejia pitched five shutout innings before leaving Tuesday's win with a strained wrist. Mejia will throw a bullpen session on Friday.

Indians: Guyer played center field for the first time since 2016 because Leonys Martin got "real sick" during the night, according to manager Terry Francona. Martin has played six games for Cleveland since being acquired in a deadline trade with Detroit.

UP NEXT

Indians ace Corey Kluber starts the finale of the four-game series against Twins RHP Jose Berrios. Kluber pitched a three-hitter and his seventh career complete-game shutout in his previous start on Aug. 3 against the Los Angeles Angels.

Twins' Forsythe holding up his end of Dozier deal **Staff Report | Fox Sports North | August 8, 2018**

Logan Forsythe, Twins second baseman (UP)

Although not part of the prospect haul the Twins received in the Brian Dozier trade, Forsythe has been pulling his weight since arriving in Minnesota. He's hitting .412 in 17 at-bats since the trade, despite hitting just .207/.270/.290 in 193 at-bats with the Dodgers this season. He leads all Twins hitters in batting average since Aug. 1. Of course.

Molitor, Twins at least considering Rays' newfangled 'openers' strategy **Dan Hayes | The Athletic | August 9, 2018**

CLEVELAND — "Openers," presented by the Twins, could soon be coming to a ballpark near you.

Manager Paul Molitor on Wednesday wouldn't rule out the possibility that before the 2018 campaign ends, the Twins could utilize a concept established by the Tampa Bay Rays earlier this season in which a reliever is used to start a game for matchup purposes.

With only four starting pitchers out of the gate, Tampa Bay always planned to have at least one contest out of every five entirely pitched by relievers. But hit hard by injuries, the Rays eventually took it a step further and have employed the innovative strategy nearly two-thirds of the time since mid-May. While the Twins haven't finalized any similar plans of their own just yet, the strategy has been studied at the minor-league level and the club is at least considering limited use in the big leagues.

"I think there's enough curiosity for us to see how it plays," Molitor said. "There are lot of factors on who you are going to open (with) and it depends on who you're going to follow, what constitutes the other team's lineup as far as if it's left/right, all those types of things. This thing has a

chance to pick up legs across the game, but you know, as we get more data in return, you can't argue with Tampa's success. That's for sure."

"It wouldn't surprise me if we did it."

Tampa Bay first turned to the concept on May 19. Facing a Los Angeles Angels lineup loaded with great right-handed hitters, manager Kevin Cash called upon veteran reliever Sergio Romo, who never before had started a game in his major-league career. Romo struck out Zack Cozart, Mike Trout and Justin Upton in the first inning before handing the ball off to Ryan Yarbrough, who pitched the next 6 1/3 innings and allowed one run.

Tampa Bay won 5-3 and the strategy was successfully born. Romo was so good, Cash asked him to open again the next night and he delivered 1 1/3 more scoreless innings. Romo has since started three more times and the Rays have used their relievers as a starting pitcher 47 times in 71 games.

Ryne Stanek, who had a 5.85 ERA entering this season, has made 18 of those starts and hadn't allowed a first-inning run until he surrendered two on Wednesday, hours after Molitor spoke about the concept.

Owners of a 4.45 ERA through their first 43 games, Tampa Bay pitchers entered Wednesday with a 3.54 ERA in 70 games since they started. While the majority of the team's veteran starting pitchers continued to start (when healthy), the Rays have performed far better this season than expected.

"They bought into it and it seems to have worked," said Twins outfielder Johnny Field, who played in 62 games for Tampa Bay this season. "They've done well with all the trades and moves they've made.

"I've heard (opposing hitters) say it's almost like (hitting in) spring training."

The Rays' model certainly opened eyes around the majors. The team's 2.87 ERA in the first inning is well below the major-league average of 4.62 as Tampa often found the best way to deal with the opposing team's 1-2-3 hitters.

Rays pitchers have a 3.69 ERA in innings one through three compared with the league average of 4.11. Their ERA in innings four through six is 3.72 compared with MLB's 4.30. Only in innings seven through nine has the league outperformed Tampa's staff with a 4.03 ERA compared to the Rays' 4.27.

"It definitely raises your antenna and gets you to think about those things," said Twins director of minor-league operations Jeremy Zoll.

The Twins have certainly considered the possibility. They've also employed it at least a dozen times themselves in three weeks between Double-A Chattanooga and Triple-A Rochester. Veteran reliever Paco Rodríguez made the organization's first opener start for Chattanooga at the Mobile Bay Bears on July 18 and struck out two in a scoreless frame before turning the ball over to Anthony Marzi, who faced 19 batters in four innings. Rodríguez, who had a 2.53 ERA with the Dodgers between 2012-15 and has never been a starter, has made three more starts since.

Part of the concept is to limit how many times a pitcher faces the opposition's lineup.

This season alone, pitchers limit opponents to a .710 OPS the first time through, a .734 OPS in their second trip with the number jumping to .791 in the third time.

But even more than that, Zoll thinks this is an opportunity to help prepare some of the team's young minor-league starting pitchers for what they might face in the majors.

He pointed to Aaron Slegers' 2018 debut (he pitched 5 1/3 innings in long relief against Kansas City) and the July 2 contest when Zack Littell was summoned in relief in a tied game in extra innings at Milwaukee and lost.

"It's an opportunity from a developmental perspective to give guys a look at what different opportunities that might pop up for them in the big leagues could be," Zoll said. "That's really tough if they've never done it all in the minor leagues. Getting guys exposed to that. The word routine is thrown around a lot.

"How do we work this into their plan where it's not a huge shift in their routine and really debilitating because the reality is they might be put in these positions early on in their careers.

"You have an opportunity to expose them to that and you can find other ways to utilize it to our advantage at the big-league level for performance benefits."

Zoll said the idea was met with some resistance at first but the players have begun to adapt. It doesn't hurt the Triple-A staff that Littell and Slegers have spent most of the year as their teammates.

It isn't without its difficulties. Normally a starter, prospect Stephen Gonsalves entered an Aug. 3 contest with a man on first base and two outs in the second inning. Gonsalves, who has a 2.82 ERA in 108 2/3 combined innings this season, went on to allow two runs in 5 1/3 innings pitched.

"It's pretty rare in baseball when you present something that's a little bit unconventional that everyone is immediately all in," Zoll said. "But like with most things, you explain the reasoning and why, the guys in Triple-A, they're watching. They're seeing it happen to Slegers and Littell. It's not like it's this made-up fantasy world. These things have all happened this year. It's a lot easier to pull from. It requires an adjustment and change in mindset and that's what we use the minor leagues for with a lot of things."

"If we do come to the conclusion that we want to implement it at the big-league level at any point, we kind of have a blueprint for how it should go."

Which brings us to Wednesday, when Molitor was asked a series of questions about the possibility. Molitor said the team has had discussions about the possibility.

He's still not certain the Twins would employ the strategy. The team's rotation has rarely caused issues this season, producing 7.6 Wins Above Replacement, which is 13th among 30 teams, according to Fangraphs.com. But Molitor is at least open-minded about the possibility of it, especially given the success Tampa Bay has had.

"We're seeing how it's playing down there," Molitor said. "I don't know if we'll get to that situation and do it by the end of the year or not. So yeah, like everything that involves change in this game, we're more than willing to look at and see if it's something for us to do."

Sanó goes deep for first time since minor-league trip

Miguel Sanó checked off yet another box after returning from the minor leagues when he blasted a game-tying home run off Cody Allen in an eventual 5-2 loss to the Cleveland Indians on Wednesday night. The opposite-field round-tripper was Sanó's first in 42 plate appearances since he rejoined the Twins in Boston on July 28. Sanó finished 2-for-4 with a double and two strikeouts.

Though the long ball has been a commonality to Sanó's previous successes at the major-league level, Twins hitting coaches have recently tried to relax their slugger, ensuring him that the homers would eventually come as the result of a sound approach. Over his last nine games, Sanó is hitting .345/.457/.586 with four doubles and a homer in 35 plate appearances.

"It was a big moment down there to take a nice at-bat," Sanó said. "Like (assistant hitting coach) Rudy Hernandez told me: 'Stay positive. Try to drive the ball to the middle. Find a good pitch to hit.' That's what I did."

"I'm feeling good. A lot of work. I've got my mind positive and I'm ready to do my stuff every day and come work. Every day, it's the same thing and I'm going to try to stay positive all the time."

Twins suffer 11th walk-off loss

The Twins eventually lost on Francisco Lindor's walk-off, three-run homer off Trevor Hildenberger in the bottom of the ninth inning. It was the 11th time this season the Twins have lost in walk-off fashion.

"It sucks," said starting pitcher Jake Odorizzi. "It's not something you want to be a part of on the crappy end. It shows we're in a lot of games. I think that's the brightest spot to take out of it. That's 11 games we're in to the very end. Couple different things. Get a big run, get something. I'm sure there's a lot of points in the game, looking back on those 11 games, that if we had done something a little bit better we could have won the game. It's just things to look forward to moving forward and being in those situations and learning from these situations this year and capitalizing on them next year."

Mejia update

The Twins still didn't have all the information they needed but felt positive about the overnight progress made by pitcher Adalberto Mejía, who left Tuesday's start after he experienced a strange sensation in his left wrist.

The team ruled it a left wrist strain. Molitor was upbeat when asked about Mejía, who still could start Sunday at Detroit if all goes well.

"He's doing better today," Molitor said. "I was hoping we would have a little better indication of what Sunday might bring. But (trainer) Tony Leo has asked to buy a little more time. He's really encouraged about the opportunity for him to go ahead and throw on Sunday. But the day after you are not going to do much. Probably long toss (Thursday) and bullpen on Friday. We are going to buy a little bit more time than the original 24 hours that we talked about."

Molitor also noted that outfielder Byron Buxton took indoor batting practice at Triple-A Rochester on Tuesday with plans to again on Wednesday.